

Introduction

This is a series of activities exploring ways to reflect, focus on the present tense, and build a sense of care and support towards others while digging into potential places of discomfort. These exercises offer a variety of different processes towards presence and an intersection point between object, story, and embodiment.

The activities were compiled based on the experiences throughout the interdisciplinary Cross Pollination residency with director/voice expert **Adrienne Mackey**, jewelry-maker **Sarah Kate Burgess**, and storyteller/breath expert **Katonya Mosley**, accompanied throughout their week by **Sam Wend** to engage in and document their practices.



We encourage you to explore some or all of these exercises. Each was led by one of the artists in the residency week, but they are all activities that anyone can do. We recommend working with a team, preferably a consistent one, in all your explorations. After each exercise, be sure to take time to reflect on it and to engage in general conversation. The shared experiences should build a more open communal meditative space.

Breathing

Breathing is never wrong. Think of your mind as a teabag; just let the thoughts flow through the pores.

Katonya served as the facilitator for our breathing exercises, with the above quote from her as a guiding principle. Your group will likely want to choose a leader as well, who can guide you through the process using the instructions described below.

To start, think about exactly where you're at today and share with your group. Everyone should set an intention for the exercise and share that as well. For example:

*"My **today** is my intent." - Katonya*

*"My intention is to find **centeredness**, a willingness to be where I am and unafraid of sharing." - Adrienne*

*"I am seeking **clarity of intention**, the ability to find grounding in the midst of feeling like I'm being pulled in a lot of different directions." - Sarah*

Settle yourself with twenty breaths: four sets each of four rapid breaths and one slow one. Then, **when you're ready, lay on the ground.**

Breathe normally, and start to notice as air infiltrates the whole body.

Gradually increase the speed of your breath, maybe to the point of discomfort.

Notice every part of you that's touching the ground.

Let yourself release sound if it's there. Don't think too hard about it.

Notice where there are sounds.

Notice how the speed of your breath makes you feel.

Slowly slowly slowly, return the speed of your breath down to neutral.

Let it go. Release yourself into regular time and space.

Sarah started with a simple intention, but by expanding its explanation, she found herself opening up about something that was hard to talk about. Setting an intention offers a chance to share a little of yourself as opaquely or transparently as you wish.

Building with Action Words

The book *Forms in Japan* by Yuichiro Kojiro offers the following chart of different ways objects can be put together. Kojiro expects a final product to be representational of the chosen form, but you can work in a more process-oriented way by thinking of the verb as your *objective* in working with a material.

This is the same work that actors do: rather than trying to force emotions, they select objectives that resonate with their given circumstances. Pursuing those objectives generates emotional outputs that are genuine rather than artificial. Likewise, if you pick a verb for your process in working with materials, the form will be ingrained in the final product.

I. FORMS OF UNITY

Forms of Continuation

of continuation
of expansion
of openness
of dilation

Forms of Enclosure

of wrapping
of enclosing
which surround
of encirclement
which hide
which cover

Forms of Union

of tying
of binding
of weaving
of joining
of bracing
of matching
of stopping

Forms of Collection

of grouping
of gathering
of piling
of layering
of heaping
of bundling
of tightening
of grasping
of felting

Forms of Arrangement

of pairing
of distribution
of complement
of surfeit
of discard
of scattering

II. FORMS OF FORCE

Forms of Support

which support
which hook
of tension
which suspend
which hang
which spread

Forms of Curve

of circling
of curve
of curvature
which rise

III. FORMS OF ADAPTATION

Forms of Fluidity

which droop
which flow
which swirl
which rotate
which smear

Forms of the Natural

of natural things
of inlay
of firing
of texture
of impression

IV. FORMS OF CHANGE

Forms of Transfiguration

of simplification
of difference
of disarrangement
of dancing
of shading
of open-work
of splashing

Forms of Severing

of tearing
of chipping
of splitting
of cutting
of severing
of dropping
of removing

Forms of Twisting

of twisting
of twining
of dappling
of crumpling
of shaving

Forms of Reduction

which are rolled
which are erased
which are folded
of storing
of bending
of shortening

Gather yourself some supplies: anything and everything that might be interesting to create or craft with, even if its use isn't immediately apparent. Find glue, tape, staplers, knives, markers and whatever else you can think of to alter materials.

Pick a word from the chart and apply it to any of the objects you've gathered, as many ways as you want. When you feel like you've exhausted explorations, move on to a new object. Just experiment. Don't get caught up in product. Just think about how to use your action word in relationship to objects. You can talk to your companions while you work, if you want. Just let the process of the action be your guide. When you're done, talk about what each person made. Reflect on how the product does or does not reflect the process word used to make it.



Mirroring

Part I

With a partner, choose a leader and a follower. **The leader should start doing movements, and the follower should mirror as closely as possible.**

- Leader, try to be kind so the follower can keep up, but also do what you want; your movements should be interesting and useful for you.
- Follower, mirror as closely as you can, but also try to find something useful in the movement as it happens. Observe the leader's intentions but create your own as well to make meaning out of your movements.

Try to sync up closely enough that an outside viewer can't identify who the leader is. Push the boundaries of what's possible: if the follower cannot see the leader because they're facing opposite directions, can she still follow?

Switch leaders after a while and see how it changes things.

Part II

Add another person or two, still with a designated leader.

- Leader, don't be afraid to repeat gestures if the others aren't following closely enough. Note that some intense/quick movements are hard to follow, especially if they're unpredictable. You might notice that it's harder to lead two people. There's more leeway now for the followers to be a little behind, because the intensity of the mirroring naturally dissipates a little with more people. The intention is more important than exact accuracy of synchronicity; it's an exercise of "body listening," of building kinesthetic awareness of each other.

Katonya shared that she initially felt a lot of fear about her body's ability to do different movements, but ended up feeling giddy from the exercise and how she felt supported, encouraged, and acknowledged. They all enjoyed moving and interacting with objects and architecture in untraditional ways, opening up the mind and forming relationships.

Let yourself notice how different kinds of bodies do different things. Do you count your facial expressions as part of mirroring?

Part III

Turn on some music. **Explore mirroring without a designated leader: just let leadership flow from person to person.** Be laterally aware of each other.

Use the whole room. Form relationships with architecture and objects. Notice when mirroring is easy, and when it's hard. Notice where you're uncomfortable with movements, but notice too that your companions are equally unaware of what's coming next, and that you're supported and acknowledged as part of a whole. Don't speak, just enjoy being in community with the others' bodies.

Expressing through Objects

Get your crafting supplies out again. This time, instead of using a verb to inspire your building, think of an action or sensation. **Use objects to communicate something you have trouble putting into words.** Think not about what you're trying to make, but about what you're trying to say.

Don't worry about how long it takes or if you're doing it "right." Just explore and play and edit and revise and think. Let the creating inspire you to reflect and ask yourself questions. Make the materials go through the same emotions you did. See what comes out of it.

When you're done, think a little about what you've made. Share it with others and see what they understand from it. Consider:

Is it self-reflective or communicative?-- Did you make something the reflects how you feel, or something that lets you explain something to others?"

What would you have used if your supply options were different?

Are senses important to you? Did you incorporate sound or smell or taste?

How did it change throughout its creation process? What was planned? What surprised you?

Even if it didn't come out exactly how you wanted it to, does what you made help you explain how it was supposed to work or what it was supposed to say?

How are your emotions associated with your memory of an event different from the emotions you were having at the time? Which did you use in your exploration?



Adrienne built a sculpture that represented a high-tension experience in her past that gives her a physical feeling she can't quite put into words. She wasn't completely satisfied with the visual result, but still felt like it was an effective way to explore her feelings and what was still unresolved about the memory.

Storytelling

You've expressed yourself through objects. Now, think about how you represent yourself through words: Think of a story to share. Keep it short, no more than three minutes; there's no pressure here. The order of your narrative can be vague – don't get caught up in linearity. You can pick any prompt to explore, but here's an example, if you need one:

Potential Prompt: Think about a recent happening that somehow involves a body part. See if you can include a surprise – don't force it, but be open to one inherent in the story.

Take three minutes to think, then share your story with the others. Let yourself be open, be vulnerable, be seen.

Offer feedback. Notice when the other storytellers seemed comfortable and natural. See whether text being planned makes the storytelling feel more “performative.” Notice gestures and common phrases and sensory awareness.

Support each other in your right to speak and tell your stories.

Breathing, Again

Try another breath exercise, now that you're more in tune with present-tense awareness. **This time, go a little longer.** Hopefully you're working with the same group as the other exercises. Hopefully you trust each other a little more now. Hopefully you're a little more prepared to dig in.

Before you start breathing, set an intention. Maybe this time, think about rules. Share something you feel you're not allowed to be, not allowed to have, and not allowed to do. For example, Sam said:

*“I'm not allowed to be wrong.
I have to fix all the problems.
I'm not allowed to have emotions when things go wrong.”*

Start slow, as before, and build up breathing speed, pushing your instinctive limits. Feel how the breath affects your relationship with the floor, your limbs, and your spirit. This time, also pay attention to your companions.

“Let your breaths dance together. Find each other, react to each other, listen to each other...”

Now, let your breath be the one that's found.”

Katonya led this breathing exercise as well. The quotes in italics beside and below are examples of some of the language she used to guide us.

Notice how that makes you feel. Are you comforted by the presence of others? Do you *want* to be heard, seen, noticed?

“Say yes. Whatever thoughts come. Say yes to weakness. Say yes to fear.”

Incrementally start slowing your breathing again. Take your time. Set a GPS location for your base pace, volume, saturation. Start veering towards that.

Notice how your breathing affects the rest of your body. Are you still? Are you tingling? How does the external represent the internal? How does it not?

“This is the last stretch.

Let these final breaths become sighs.

Let the sighs tell the story of what we just went through.

Now, take as long as you need. Let your eyes come open. Let yourself find the ground again.”

Sam had an intense response to this exercise. She was amazed by the power of breathing to make her entire body vibrate and to unlock emotions she often keeps buried, and then to find that she felt safe enough in the room to share what she'd experienced.

After, check in with your companions. See how your journeys were different.

Check in about your intentions. Decide how much of your journey you want or need to share. Remember that you are supported in your everyday communication, as your breaths supported each other.

Telling Someone Else's Story

Tell a partner a story and listen closely as they tell you one in return. Notice everything about how they tell the story, not just the general narrative, but word choice and physical gestures and facial expressions and breaks in sentences.

Potential Story Prompt: Share a moment that made you realize how you perceive others or how others perceive you.

After you and your partner have both shared, join another group and tell them your partner's story as if you are your partner. You're not just retelling the story in your own words; you are using all the little details you observed to embody the original storyteller, using personal pronouns (I, me, my) and literally planting yourself in the other person's story.

- As the storyteller, notice how much responsibility you feel to get things right. Notice where it's easy to remember things and where it's harder. Listen to the original storyteller's feedback about what resonated with or jarred them.

- As a listener, see what it looks like to see your gestures from the outside. Pay attention to what stood out to your partner and how that might be different from how you think about the story. Consider what the retelling says about how you conveyed your story, what it says about what the listener notices or focuses on, and where the convergence of those points lies.

This might be a little scary. It might feel very personal to tell someone else's story, to genuinely embody them rather than imitate them. But remember that they are taking on the same responsibility to you. By trying on both roles, you ensure support in the vulnerability of both sides of the exploration.

Singing Onto Bodies

Try singing onto yourself first, to get an understanding of the sensation: sing ooohs and aaahs and ees onto your arm in different places, with different volumes and pitches. Notice how the vibrations and sensations feel.

Then in your group, choose one person to be the first “subject” to sing onto. That person should **choose a comfortable position, generally seated, that they can hold for a long time**. The rest of the group, ideally a trio for the most interesting sound improvisation, should **surround the subject and sing sounds onto the subject’s body, exploring different pitches, vowel sounds, and resonances**.



- As a subject, you might feel a little uncomfortable at first, but let yourself settle into it. Let the singing lend support to different parts of your body.

- As a singer, you might notice as you sing onto different people’s bodies which parts of them “sparkle” with the sound; there will be places where singing just feels more needed or right or interesting than others. There will also be different sounds and vocal shapes that work better on different bodies than others. Listen to your fellow singers. Don’t work too hard to be in sync,

but notice what kinds of chords you build together and what kind of relationship your sounds start to form. This should be a gift and a comfort to all.

Repeating and Sounding

Find something you can do over and over again. Maybe it’s tying knots in each of the small holes in a mesh bag. Maybe it’s shaving countless tiny slivers off a piece of wood. Maybe it’s stitching a crosshatch pattern into an envelope. Maybe it’s adding layer after layer of clay swirls on top of each other. It doesn’t matter what it is. Just give your hands an active task and pursue it without thinking too hard about it.

Then, start making sounds. Don’t talk to each other, just build a soundscape. Keys might change and overlap, but don’t worry about resolving discordance immediately. If you have to drop out for a little bit and listen, that’s okay too. Sometimes noises that aren’t intended to be part of the soundscape make it that much more interesting.

All that is okay. There are no rules. Just listen and sound and make, without any intention towards a finished product.

Onwards...

We hope you have found the courage and dedication to dive into these exercises, to explore and learn with a group of similarly reflective people. What came up for you? What did you learn about yourself and each other?

We’d love to hear about your experience - feel free to drop us a line at swimponypa@gmail.com to share your journey or to ask any questions you might have. Even more so though, we hope that you found a space of reflection and exploration, that you enjoyed the work but were not afraid to shy away from anything challenging that might’ve come up.

What exercises can you think of to continue exploring? We encourage you to develop activities of your own, perhaps guided by your own areas of expertise. The sky’s the limit – keep exploring!